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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

World Youth Report 2003

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In its resolution 2001/7 of 24 July 2001, the Economic and Social Council decided that the Commission for Social Development would review the global situation of youth at its forty-first session. In its decision 2002/237, the Council adopted the provisional agenda for the Commission at its forty-first session, calling for the submission of a report of the Secretary-General on this topic. The General Assembly, in its resolution 56/117, requested the Secretary-General to present a comprehensive report on this issue, with concrete and action-oriented recommendations, to the Commission at its forty-first session. In the same resolution, it invited the Secretary-General to conduct a thorough review of and provide recommendations on the World Youth Forum's structure, organization, participation, including to ensure that it is fully representative of all geographical regions and of a diversity of views, and processes, taking into account the views of Member States and youth organizations, and, in this context, to include this matter in his report to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, through the Commission for Social Development at its forty-first session.

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The present report combines the responses to the requests of the Council and the Assembly. Section I contains a review of the current global situation of young people, based on the findings of the Expert Group Meeting on Global Priorities for Youth, held at Helsinki in October 2002, organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with the Ministry of Education of the Government of Finland. On the basis of discussions, a separate, more elaborate study will be published in 2003. Section II presents an evaluation of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System, last held in Dakar from 6 to 10 August 2001. The findings are based on a questionnaire circulated to all Member States and on surveys sent to all Forum participants in early 2002. Recommendations are to be found throughout the text and are rendered in bold type.

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I. The current global situation of youth: some highlights

1. The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond[1] contains the primary set of guidelines for youth policies to be carried out by Member States of the United Nations. It covers ten priority areas for national youth policies and provides a framework to measure and evaluate achievements. This review of the global situation of youth takes up not only the ten priority areas set out in the World Programme of Action, but also five new issues of concern to young people that have emerged since its adoption. All 15 are outlined below.

2. So as to place youth in a larger context of demographics, as well as to give a sense of the magnitude of youth as a sector of the world population, it is fitting to point out that from 1995 to 2000 the world's youth population is estimated to have grown by an average of 0.7 per cent per year, from 1.025 billion to 1.061 billion (the latter figure representing 518 million young women and 543 million young men between 15 and 24 years of age).[2] At present, almost 60 per cent of the world's youth lives in the developing countries of Asia, with another 15 per cent in Africa and approximately 10 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Approximately 15 per cent lives in developed regions. Globally, youth represents 18 per cent of the world population.

A. Review of ten priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond

1. Education

3. Education is the single most important factor for young people to lead productive and responsible lives. Educational status of youth can be divided into three broad categories. The first is defined by participation in primary education. In countries of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, such participation remains low, with wide enrolment gaps, largely accounted for by gender discrimination, membership in minority groups, rural location and poverty. The second is defined by secondary education. In parts of Western Asia and northern Africa, and in most of Latin America, while gender gaps are small, social inequalities in educational opportunities at the secondary level are very marked and completion rates are often low. This is also the case for the newly independent Central Asian republics, although participation rates in both primary and secondary education are typically better than in the other regions included in this grouping. Third is the situation in which participation rates in primary and secondary education are relatively high throughout the whole education and training system, but where social background and ethnicity still make noticeable differences to educational opportunities. Also, gender gaps are evident in the distribution of young women and young men across educational sectors and subjects, and at the highest levels of the system. This is the case in most of the developed world, although national patterns vary considerably. **Overall, the commitments made under the Millennium development goals are clear on the emphasis placed on both primary and secondary education, aspects of particular relevance for young people between the ages of 15 and 24.**

4. Illiteracy continues to be an enormous problem for many young people in the world. In 2000, approximately 82 million young women and 51 million young men were illiterate. Another 130 million children are currently not in school, and they

will become the illiterate youth and adults of tomorrow. Despite improvements, illiteracy rates for young women in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia currently average between 25 and 30 per cent. As further evidence of the gender gap, rates are typically at least 10 percentage points lower for young males in these regions.

5. Formal school systems and curricula may be considered less important in cultures that emphasize the role of family and local community as primary agents and contexts for socialization and learning. Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement that education, literacy and numeracy are essential for young people, and that educational policy and provision must respond to the realities of young people's lives, which can be achieved only through formal systems. **The participation of students as partners in reviewing and renewing educational systems is crucial. Linkages between schools and the private sector and the importance of informal and vocational education to young people should also be considered.**

6. **In view of the foregoing, renewed emphasis should be placed on implementing lifelong learning schemes** to provide culturally, socially and economically appropriate education. Lifelong learning schemes, particularly those in informal and non-formal settings, can bring various benefits: they can provide people who live in countries without universal education with access to learning opportunities on an ongoing basis; they can address the problem of conventional formal schooling being too far removed from local cultural and social environments; and they can alleviate economic hardship, particularly for young people in developing countries who may experience strong pressures to earn income to help support their families or — particularly if they are girls — to take on significant responsibilities at home.

2. Employment

7. Youth makes up more than 40 per cent of the world's total unemployed. Youth unemployment can lead to marginalization, exclusion, frustration, low self-esteem and, sometimes, to acts that create burdens on society. There are an estimated 66 million unemployed young people in the world today; at least 50 of the countries for which data are available have youth unemployment rates of more than 15 per cent.

8. There is evidence that young people, not by choice but by necessity, increasingly turn to the informal sector for their livelihood. This "twilight zone" of work is characterized by informal, part-time or casual jobs that do not have the benefits and security of regular employment; worse, it also includes subsistence self-employment, or "forced entrepreneurship". Forced by poverty and the lack of possibilities for better jobs, many young people have no alternative but to turn to informal activities to earn income. With economic growth being insufficient to absorb new labour force entrants, there is a danger that informal work will become the only option for large numbers of young people, thereby making the objective of a decent job for all increasingly unavailable. Increasingly, the distinction between employment and unemployment has lost much of its meaning, as young people move in and out of informal activities where neither term has any real relevance.

9. In addressing youth employment, Governments tend to focus on the supply side of the labour market rather than on labour demand. In other words, Governments typically try to reduce unemployment by addressing lack of skills or attitudes of young people, rather than concentrating on promoting economic growth and job creation. Providing young people with opportunities to learn through work

may prove more effective than attempting to upgrade their skills before they enter the labour force.

10. The Youth Employment Network, launched jointly by the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Labour Organization, attempts to address the youth unemployment problem. The Network highlights four aspects that need further attention: employability — investing in education and vocational training for young people and improving the impact of those investments; equal opportunities — giving young women the same opportunities as young men; entrepreneurship — making it easier to start and run enterprises to provide more and better jobs for young women and men; and employment creation — placing job creation at the centre of macroeconomic policy. **The active participation of young people in programme design and implementation is a key to achieving these goals.**

3. Hunger and poverty

11. It is extremely difficult to estimate the number of young people living in poverty. If poverty is defined by the prevalence of malnutrition, the estimated number of youth in extreme poverty ranges from 38 million to 110 million. If defined as living on less than the widely used figure of $1 per day, the number of youth in poverty rises to 238 million; and if the broader definition of $2 per day is used, the number of young people in poverty becomes 462 million. **There is some evidence to suggest that nutrition-based estimates could be more accurate. Obviously, more research on young people living in poverty is needed to provide a workable estimate. Having such an estimate would contribute immeasurably to better coming to grips with the challenges involved in eradicating poverty.**

12. One mechanism used by young people in response to situations of poverty is migration. Many young people leave their homes in search of opportunities for better lives. Migration from rural to urban areas is often age-selective, with the young among the first to move. Consequently, the proportion of young people living in poverty in rural areas is often quite low. However, with urban employment opportunities lacking, the proportion of unemployed, and thus poor, young people in cities may be quite high, representing the shifting of the rural incidence of youth poverty to urban areas. International migration — both legal and illegal — is another route taken by many young people seeking better lives. **Rural development policies may stem the tide of rural-to-urban migration.** However, the extent to which they will be successful in retaining young people in rural areas remains to be seen.

13. Even though the various estimates of young people living in poverty point to significant numbers, they do not appear to be high on policy makers' lists of groups vulnerable to poverty, because of their youth, perceived resilience and ability to migrate to industrial centres. To illustrate this perception, only a few examples exist where poverty reduction strategies actually identify youth as a major focus group. **Yet it may be worthwhile to consider giving more recognition to young people who have a high potential to respond positively to employment- and income-generating programmes that address poverty.** Providing today's young people with the wherewithal to become productive members of society will be an investment in the future that yields enormous benefits.

4. Health issues

14. Although young people are generally among the healthiest population groups, this does not mean that poor health, resulting from disease, accidents and injury, is insignificant for them. Factors that influence the health of young people are numerous and interrelated. Consequently, successful health policies for young people must be interdisciplinary and intersectoral, taking into account not only their physical condition, but also their personal, social and mental development. **Therefore, it is imperative that national youth health policies or strategies go beyond the health sector alone.**

15. Health professionals can support a nurturing environment provided by parents, community leaders and others who bear responsibility for the health of young people. However, participation by young people in all stages of health provision — needs assessment, design, delivery and evaluation — to ensure that health responses are appropriate, effective and efficient is equally, if not more, important. Promoting good health for young people depends a great deal on providing information and on promoting the development of life skills, the ability to deal with sexuality in a mature manner, the exercise of good judgement, the development of healthy self-esteem, the management of emotions and feelings and the ability to handle pressure.

16. **There is a continued need to address young people's sexual and reproductive health from a preventive, rights-based, gender-responsive and empowering approach.** Such an approach would build on their creative energies and respect their rights and capacities for participation and leadership in decisions that affect their lives. Sexual and reproductive health — understood as a holistic concept of overall well-being relating to emotional, mental and physical health — is an essential component of young people's ability to become well-adjusted, responsible and productive members of society.

5. Environment

17. Young people have both special concern and special responsibility with regard to the environment. On the one hand, because of their longer life expectancy young people will have to live with the consequences of a deteriorating environment left to them by their parents. On the other hand, youth has a special talent for invention and the development of new forms of action and activism that can enable and accelerate effective responses to environmental issues. Representing the concerns of future generations is of course difficult when it comes to policy-making in the present; ultimately, however, what is required is not to expand time horizons many years into the future, but simply to expand them beyond the short-term focus of much current decision-making.

18. Recently, young people demonstrated through their participation at the World Summit on Sustainable Development that they could inject social values and notions of equity into debate. Young people perhaps understand better than most that we are not living in a zero-sum, environment-versus-economy world. One way to equip young people to contribute more in the area of environmental concerns is through more effective environmental education. Much of the information that young people receive about environmental issues comes from the media. **Therefore, environmental educators and the media should make greater efforts to promote a larger process of social learning for sustainable development.**

6. Drug abuse

19. Alcohol, tobacco and cannabis are the drugs most used by young people around the world. Use of alcohol is part of many cultures, and for many young people the first drinking experience often occurs in the context of family events. Notwithstanding this benign image, alcohol represents the greatest public health burden, owing in large part to acute alcohol-related incidents such as violence and accidents. Besides alcohol, tobacco-related illnesses are among the chief preventable causes of death in the world, and most smokers begin as teenagers or younger. It is estimated that 20 per cent of smokers worldwide began before the age of 10.

20. The use of cannabis and other illicit substances appears to have stabilized at relatively high levels in most developed countries. Usage rates in Central and Eastern Europe have reached the levels of Western Europe. Countries interpret differently the legal provisions on how to prosecute those who use cannabis. In a number of countries there is a tendency to decriminalize use without technically legalizing the drugs. This policy is not seen positively by those countries that believe it necessary to be tough on drugs. Worldwide over the past decade, usage rates for ecstasy and other amphetamine-type stimulants have increased more than for any other drug.

21. **Each country and community requires a unique mix of demand reduction strategies that responds to its particular circumstances and uses the resources on hand. An effective demand reduction strategy consists of a combination of selective prevention, harm reduction, indicative prevention and treatment activities.** While much information is available on which to base drug demand reduction strategies and programmes, this does not automatically mean that interventions, no matter how much they have been studied, can be successfully replicated in more than one or two regions of the world.

22. Family programmes designed for general populations, addressing communication, coping and disciplinary skills, can discourage the use of alcohol, tobacco and cannabis by young people in their early to middle teens. Messages that focus solely on the negative aspects of drug use may be effective with younger participants, but can lose credibility with older adolescents, who may receive other information and face stronger peer pressure to partake. At whatever age, young people respond best to teachers, leaders or counsellors who demonstrate competence, empathy and the ability to respect and engage them.

7. Juvenile delinquency

23. Juvenile delinquency refers to a multitude of different violations of legal and social norms, ranging from minor offences to severe crimes committed by minors. Some types of juvenile delinquency form part of the process of maturation and growth, and will disappear spontaneously as young people make the transition to adulthood. In fact, many socially responsible adults committed some kind of petty offence during their adolescence.

24. This being said, young people who are marginalized are more susceptible to developing and maintaining delinquent behaviour. Poverty, social exclusion and unemployment often cause marginalization. Furthermore, young people are more likely to become victims of crimes committed by juvenile delinquents. Delinquency is a group phenomenon; it is frequently related to certain subcultures of young

people, in which they share a certain form of joint assumed identity. It is also primarily a male phenomenon, with crime rates for male juvenile and young adult offenders more than double those for females. Some criminal activities can be associated with intolerance for members of other cultures or religious, racial or ethnic groups.

25. **An effective policy to address delinquency is to give higher priority to marginalized, vulnerable and disadvantaged young people in society. Issues of young people in conflict with the law should be central to national youth policies. Responsibilities for juvenile justice should be decentralized in order to encourage local authorities to be actively involved in preventing youth crime and to actively reintegrate young offenders through social integration projects, thereby fostering responsible citizenship.**

8. Leisure

26. In every culture, there are hours in the day when young people are not formally required to be in school or engaged in household or paid work. These discretionary hours, and the activities undertaken during them, are integral and essential to the development of personal identity and can contribute to community solidarity.

27. Leisure time provides a key context for education and learning, and can have a strong impact on a number of important aspects of young people's lives, including their health, their ability to participate in society, their prospects for gaining employment and even their formal schooling. How young people spend their leisure time can directly affect their well-being, as they may be exposed to pressing threats such as HIV/AIDS, delinquency, conflict and drug abuse. **Because of these interconnections, it is critical that leisure be considered as a context for the personal growth of young people and for their participation in the development of their community and society.** There is great value in making the links between youth leisure and youth action — links that should be recognized by practitioners and parents as well as by policy makers and the general public.

9. Girls and young women

28. Many adolescent girls and young women continue to face gender-based stereotyping that often has deep historical and cultural roots. While girls are traditionally perceived to pose less of a threat to social order than boys, to be less likely to get into trouble on the streets or become involved in crime, and to be more amenable to family authority at home, in many cultures boys have been — and perhaps still are — valued more highly than girls from birth.

29. Gender-based stereotyping, combined with outright and disguised forms of discrimination, creates a series of risks to the health and well-being of girls and young women that are greater than those faced by their brothers. In addition to the consequences of early pregnancy and childbirth, females suffer higher rates of accidental death, suicide, victimization by violent crime, sexually transmitted diseases and mental disorders. Female infanticide, inadequate provision of food and medical care, physical abuse, genital mutilation and forced sex threaten the lives of many girls. Violence against women, including young women, cuts across all social and economic strata and is deeply embedded in cultures around the world.

30. Thanks to concerted efforts, enrolment at all levels of education has generally improved for girls and young women, and the gender gap in schooling has been reduced in most regions of the world. Nevertheless, the gap remains wide in many countries, and gender-based stereotyping and discrimination continue to affect educational attainment. Earning potential has increased for many individual young women who have completed higher levels of education — a positive outcome of the reduction of the gender gap in education. There is still ample evidence, however, that in employment many women do not receive equal remuneration for work that is equal to that of their male colleagues.

31. The universal principles adopted by the international community set the norm for equality that demands that girls and women be seen as unique individuals, just like boys and men, and that they have similar rights and responsibilities. **There is strong evidence that a rights-based approach to addressing the issues of gender inequality can be effective.**

10. Youth participation

32. The frequent and widespread failure of the adult world to act in ways that promote the welfare of young people leads to a call to listen to them and engage them in strengthening participatory democracy. Youth participation can lead to better decisions and outcomes. It promotes the well-being and development of young people; it strengthens their commitment to and understanding of human rights and democracy; it protects them better; and it answers the call of young people who want to take part in decision-making processes.

33. Recognition of the value of youth participation has taken hold from the global level to the local community. Recognition, however, is not the same as action, and progress in this domain has been slow. Even in countries that have achieved progress, participation remains piecemeal and insufficiently integrated into all areas of young people's lives. Many organizations lack confidence in seeking youth participation as a means to reach their programme goals. Initiatives may be limited to seeking the views of young people on particular issues, and rarely include their involvement in decision-making. Young people thus remain marginal to most democratic processes. Token participation is meaningless if it does not empower young people to influence outcomes and achieve real change.

34. Progress made to date in promoting participation should be sustained and developed. **Youth participation must become an integral aspect of local, national and international policies for youth, and provide the framework for decisions and actions that affect the daily lives of children and young people.** Only then will the traditional approaches towards children and young people begin to evolve, and the oft-stated commitment to their participation begin to have meaning. The approach must promote respect for them as social actors, as agents in their own lives and as citizens of their own societies.

B. Review of five new concerns emerging since the adoption of the World Programme of Action

1. Globalization

35. The growing economic and cultural interlinkages among societies that are collectively known as globalization have been well documented and discussed. Globalization has been described as a double-edged sword, offering benefits to some that are often accompanied by costs to others. Whereas many people consider globalization to be an inevitable process, many of the economic and social changes taking place are the result of deliberate economic and financial policy choices.

36. Both the benefits bestowed and the challenges posed by globalization vary among age groups. In general, young people are able to adapt to changing circumstances, and many are in a position to take advantage of new opportunities, an ability that would seem to diminish with age. Nonetheless, large numbers of young people do not have the necessary skills, information or access to the global economy to take advantage of the globalization process. Many suffer from new or increased competition and are at risk of falling further behind. The fact that young people enjoy benefits of globalization does not guarantee that they are in a position to shape the process. Young people are rarely involved in the decision-making that drives globalization, although they will inherit the world that globalization creates. **Fundamental issues to be addressed are how young people can prepare to benefit from the opportunities and respond to the risks of globalization, and the extent to which they can influence its direction.**

37. With regard to the social aspects of globalization, many young people have adopted a global viewpoint, manifested through global contacts and lasting bonds of solidarity among youth on various issues of global concern. Globalization has intensified worldwide social relations, linking people in distant localities in ways that make local concerns global, and global concerns local. Young people are championing such issues as environmental protection, social and economic justice and human rights, and, ironically, in the process, are using the very technologies that underpin globalization to attack the policies that drive it.

2. Information and communication technologies

38. Globalization is powered in part by tremendous and rapid advances in information and communication technologies (ICT), and young people are often among the first to take advantage of their introduction. Young people are capable of using ICT in diverse and novel ways. Because of that ability, traditional forms of socialization, such as family and school, are increasingly challenged and surpassed. Many of the daily perceptions, experiences and interactions that young people have are "virtual", transmitted through various forms of information and entertainment technologies, the foremost of which continues to be television rather than the Internet. These technologies offer a culture of information, pleasure and relative autonomy, all of which are of particular appeal to young people.

39. Even though young people are at the forefront of the information revolution, at the same time they are confronted with the challenge of reconciling the reality of their daily existence with the popular images presented by that revolution. For many young people, the sphere of experience has become global and local at once. Young people may develop a global consciousness yet still have to function and survive in

their own locality and culture. At the same time, many young people, particularly in developing countries, are excluded from this information revolution, leaving them on the wrong side of the digital divide. A fundamental question about how ICT and the digital divide relate to the process of global development is not about technology or politics: it is about reconciling global and local practices. The challenge is to give culturally valid meaning to the use of new technologies.

40. While the use of ICT for development cannot be underestimated, it should not be seen as a panacea that will solve problems of unemployment and social exclusion in the near future. This observation is of particular relevance to young people because there is ample reason to question whether the adoption of technology-based development strategies will result in real benefits accruing to all young people. It will, for example, take many years for all young people to gain access to the opportunities promised by ICT. Notwithstanding these caveats, there is reason to be cautiously hopeful and optimistic about the potential of ICT, especially in view of the relative advantage that young people have in embracing these technologies for their own benefit.

3. HIV/AIDS

41. Every day 6,000 young people become infected with HIV. The rate of new infection is now higher among young women than among young men, and the age at which infection occurs is dropping. It is estimated that in 2001 7.3 million young women and 4.5 million young men were living with HIV/AIDS. Infection rates among girls are increasing faster because of greater biological susceptibility, lack of financial security, forced and early marriage, rape and sexual abuse and trafficking of young women. On average, women are 10 years younger than men at the time of infection and, consequently, many will die of AIDS at earlier ages. This shift will dramatically change the face of AIDS in years to come.

42. Most people become infected with HIV through blood transfusions, the sharing of needles for injecting drugs and unprotected sexual activity. Young people may be more likely than their elders to engage in risky behaviour, making them more susceptible to the risk of infection. There are a number of reasons for this, including lack of information, peer pressure, inability to calculate risk or a greater willingness to take calculated risks, impaired judgement because of intoxication, inability to refuse unprotected sex and limited availability of, or access to, condoms.

43. Because the risk of HIV infection is tied directly to individual behaviour, reducing risk involves changing behaviour. **To decrease the risk of infection immediately, it is essential that young people receive education about HIV and AIDS.** This information should not patronize them, and it should take into account the realities of their daily lives, including the pressures they face. Within the context of reducing all use of illicit drugs, continuing efforts should be made to warn young people of the extra danger associated with sharing needles. With regard to sexual behaviour, abstention, mutual monogamy between uninfected partners and the correct and consistent use of condoms are the only options for avoiding infection. Young people should have access to the information and services they need to protect their health and to the rehabilitative services they require to ensure the quality of their lives.

44. In the design of prevention programmes for youth, policy makers should note that studies now show that, whatever its initial entry point into a population, HIV

eventually spreads through sexual transmission. **Therefore, all young people need information on the risks of sexual transmission and means of protection,** even if they do not live in a region or community that is currently experiencing a sexually driven epidemic.

4. Youth and conflict prevention

45. Between 1989 and 2000, 111 armed conflicts were reported in the world, the majority occurring in the poorest developing countries, particularly in Africa. Many involved internal disputes and were characterized by groups using light weapons and small arms. The resort to armed conflict has put many youth at risk of succumbing to violence. Currently, there are 300,000 child and youth soldiers fighting in 49 countries. There is no conflict without youth participation; indeed, young men constitute the majority of most armed forces. In the past decade, an estimated 2 million children and youth were killed or died in armed conflict, and 5 million were disabled.

46. Exposure to violence during formative years can have a defining influence on the characters of young people involved in armed conflict — either as perpetrators or as victims. The effects of armed conflict on the physical and mental well-being of young people, and on their future prospects for leading normal lives, are cause for serious concern. **Existing prohibitions against the use of child soldiers should be strictly respected, and special care should be given to protecting civilians, particularly children and youth, from falling victim to conflicts.**

47. **Notwithstanding the considerations above, there are numerous examples of young people taking part in activities that build peace, promote a culture of peace and ultimately prevent conflict. These efforts should be strengthened and supported.**

5. Intergenerational relations

48. Although the number of young people in the world has reached unprecedented levels, the combined effects of declining birth and mortality rates worldwide have produced an ageing world, with profound implications for the future. One day in the middle of the twenty-first century, older persons and youth will represent an equal share of the world's population. Globally, the proportion of persons aged 60 years and older is expected to more than double, from 10 to more than 20 per cent, and the proportion of children to drop by a third, from about 30 to 20 per cent. In developing countries, the proportion of older persons is expected to rise from 8 to 19 per cent, while the proportion of children will fall from 33 to 22 per cent. Regional variations remain significant. Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean can expect a major shift in their ageing-to-youth ratios, but Europe will still have the highest ratio and Africa the lowest: almost three persons aged 60 years and above for every child under 15 in Europe, and almost three children under 15 for every person aged 60 years and above in Africa. The ageing of societies creates new challenges. The outcome of the Second World Assembly on Ageing recognized the growing need to strengthen solidarity among generations and promote intergenerational partnerships, while keeping in mind the particular needs of both older and younger generations.

49. Despite these expected demographic shifts, a critical share of policy-making remains locked in the old paradigm: social investment is for the young, social protection is for the old. This paradigm emerged when the world was largely three-

generational, and age-based roles were relatively unambiguous. But the world is increasingly four- and five-generational, family structures continue to evolve, and needs for social services will continue to change. It follows that policies and programmes should adopt a more age-integrated approach without delay. Instead of focusing solely on the costs associated with particular populations, policies and programmes should promote the development of social and economic participation for multigenerational households and the maintenance of patterns of exchange and reciprocity, and structures for mutual support. **Policies should reflect a new intergenerational contract, based on the realities of a multigenerational society, reaffirming the value of reciprocity for current and future recipients.**

II. Evaluation of the fourth session of the World Youth Forum

A. Background of the World Youth Forum

50. An important objective for the World Youth Forum of the United Nations system is to function as an effective channel of communication between non-governmental youth organizations and the United Nations system to incorporate the interests of youth into the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth.[3] At the same time, it should be noted that the Forum is not an intergovernmental meeting. In this sense, it should not be confused with the major United Nations conferences and summits of the 1990s. Four sessions of the Forum have been held. Two were convened in Vienna, in 1991 and 1996, the third in Braga, Portugal, in 1998, and the fourth in Dakar in 2001. Following the Braga and Dakar sessions, the agreed outcome documents were submitted to the General Assembly by the respective host Governments. The Third Committee and the General Assembly considered these documents, and reference was made to them in subsequent resolutions on youth.[4]

Organization

51. The Government of Senegal hosted the fourth session of the Forum, the funding for which was coordinated and solicited by the United Nations Secretariat. Contributions were made by Member States, United Nations agencies and a philanthropic foundation. Most of the amount contributed was used to fund participants from least developed countries and to provide local support services. The host Government provided interpretation and translation services in Arabic, English, French and Spanish for the plenary meetings of the Forum; informal arrangements were made for language services in the working groups.

Structure

52. For the fourth session of the Forum, in Dakar, an International Planning Committee was established, with responsibilities for planning, organizing, and directing the Forum. Its membership included regional youth and student bodies, international non-governmental youth and youth-related organizations, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, and representatives of the host country. The Committee met four times[5] between 1999 and 2001 to decide on all aspects of the structure of the Forum, and requested staff of the Programme on Youth (Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs) to

provide support, coordinate the dissemination of information and secure funding for the Forum.

53. The Committee developed the objectives for the fourth session of the Forum. These included assessing the progress made by the United Nations system and youth non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Braga Youth Action Plan, adopted at the previous session, including at the local, national, and regional levels, and other relevant action plans; and identifying new opportunities for empowering youth. Based on the last objective, the theme for the fourth session became "Empowering youth to take action".

54. Four regional preparatory meetings were held: one in Addis Ababa for the African region, with support from the Economic Commission for Africa; one in Panama for Latin America and the Caribbean; one in Bangkok for the Asia-Pacific region, with support from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; and one in Beirut for Western Asia, organized with support from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. At these regional meetings, young representatives from national and subregional organizations produced working documents for the Forum, highlighting specific concerns of their regions.

Process

55. The Forum in Dakar consisted of plenary meetings, 10 working groups and a Drafting Committee. Plenary meetings were open to all participants and included a number of meetings in which United Nations agencies presented information on their work related to youth. Five regional caucus groups, meeting the day before the opening of the Forum, chose leaders for both the plenary meetings and the working groups. These caucus groups also prioritized the inputs from their respective regional preparatory meetings and formulated new initiatives to be included in the final document.

56. Each working group addressed one of the 10 topics identified at the previous meeting of the Forum, in Braga. With representatives from specialized United Nations agencies and elected youth participants acting as co-conveners, these groups reviewed some of the pertinent issues in the form of outcome documents and provided inputs to the Drafting Committee for adoption.

57. The Drafting Committee consisted of 13 members, with 10 members nominated by the regional caucus groups, two members representing the United Nations system and a Chairperson elected by the International Planning Committee. From the outcome documents proposed by the working groups, the Drafting Committee developed the Dakar Youth Empowerment Strategy, which was subsequently discussed and agreed upon in a full-day plenary meeting of the Forum.

Participation

58. Participants in the Forum were selected by a subcommittee of the International Planning Committee, which was composed of two representatives from youth organizations, two representatives from the United Nations system and one representative of the Senegalese National Youth Council. From more than 700 applicants, it selected 181 young participants. The International Planning Committee instructed its Selection Committee to ensure that applicants, preferably between 15 and 24 years of age, represented legitimate and democratic youth organizations, and

to pay special attention to female applicants, as well as to applicants representing indigenous and marginalized people.

59. Three forms of participation were identified by the International Planning Committee: (a) by delegates, representing national, regional and international youth bodies; (b) by observers from agencies of the United Nations system and youth-related intergovernmental organizations; and (c) by special guests, including representatives of Governments, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and others. Delegates had speaking rights and voting rights; observers and special guests had only speaking rights. This categorization of participants ensured that only young people chosen by their organizations would be able to vote on the final outcome document.

60. A total of 181 participants representing youth and youth-related organizations from 89 countries, including 32 least developed countries, attended the Forum. In addition, 17 United Nations agencies, funds and programmes were represented by 68 participants. Neither gender balance nor regional balance was achieved: 63 per cent of the participants were male, and 81 per cent were from Africa, Europe and North America, with only 19 per cent coming from other regions.

B. Summary of results of an evaluation survey of participants

61. In order to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the Forum, a survey was conducted covering several aspects: structure, organization, participation and processes. A total of 65 responses was received, a response rate of 21 per cent. The average age of respondents was 26, with 57 per cent of respondents below 24. Besides addressing the stated objectives of the Forum, the survey also attempted to elicit the personal objectives of participants. These included networking with others, learning about the United Nations system and its functions, and representing and serving as advocates for the youth of their home countries.

62. Overall, participants rated the Forum as slightly below average (see table, question 1). Many respondents found that there was a lack of time, sometimes a lack of leadership or procedures, and a lack of communication at the Forum. While some called for stronger structures for working groups and the plenary, others were of the opinion that the structure was too formal. On a positive note, more than two thirds of the respondents, 67.8 per cent, rated the conference facilities as good or excellent. However, 59 per cent reported one or more logistical problems, and 30 per cent noted that the cost of staying at the conference centre was prohibitive. Furthermore, a number of respondents replied that lack of language services had hindered the outputs of the working groups. Respondents were also asked how much the Forum had contributed to their understanding of the United Nations system. The majority, 70.4 per cent, stated they learned either a moderate amount or a lot about the United Nations system.

Summarized results of qualitative questions of the participant survey

	Percentage of responses					
	Very poor (1 point)	*Poor (2 points)*	*Average (3 points)*	*Good (4 points)*	*Excellent (5 points)*	*Mean result*
1. What is your overall rating of the Forum?	7.7	33.8	33.8	20.0	4.6	*2.8*
2. What is your rating of the Forum's outcome document?	4.9	27.9	29.5	31.1	6.6	*3.1*
3. To what extent has the Forum involved youth in decision-making at the United Nations?[a]	26.2	27.9	0.0	37.7	8.2	*2.8*
4. Did the Forum reach its stated goals?	18.3	26.7	26.7	18.3	10.3	*2.8*
5. Did the Forum help you reach your personal goals?	6.3	14.3	31.7	38.1	9.5	*3.2*
					Yes	*No*
6. Should the United Nations conduct another World Youth Forum?					88	12

[a] For question 3, responses were divided into only 4 categories, "none", "a little", "moderately" and "a lot"; there was no rating of "average" for that question.

63. Concerning the outcome document, the mean rating was slightly above average (see table, question 2). While 38 per cent of respondents rated the outcome document as good or excellent, one third rated it as poor or very poor, and 29 per cent rated it as average.

64. In regard to involving youth in decision-making at the United Nations, the Forum also scored below average (see table, question 3). More than a quarter of respondents stated that the Forum did not involve youth at all in United Nations decision-making processes. Slightly more than half (54.1 per cent) of respondents felt that the Forum provided either little or a moderate amount of youth involvement in decision-making at the United Nations.

65. The responses to questions 4 and 5 in the table provide ratings as to the effectiveness of the Forum. For question 4, on the extent to which the Forum had reached its stated goals, the mean result was slightly below average. Concerning the ability of participants to achieve their three most important individual goals, and then to rate the Forum's effectiveness in helping them reach each of them, the mean result was above average. Thus, it appears that the Forum was marginally more effective at reaching participants' individual goals than reaching its stated goals.

66. Significantly, a large majority of respondents, 88 per cent, felt that the United Nations should continue to conduct the World Youth Forum. When asked to describe conditions that should apply for conducting future sessions, approximately 28 per cent of respondents indicated that more representative participation should be ensured, taking into consideration concerns regarding the high cost of participation. Finally, in response to qualitative questions on processes, some respondents were concerned about regional imbalances and perceived some regions as having undue influence.

C. Results of questionnaire sent to Member States

67. Besides the survey conducted among the participants in the Forum, a questionnaire attached to a note verbale was also sent to all Member States in June 2002. Nine Governments responded. The survey contained open-ended questions on structure, process, organization and participation in the Forum.

General comments received

68. General comments of support for the Forum were received from most of the countries that responded to the survey. The Netherlands indicated that it attached great importance to involving young people in the work of the United Nations. The Philippines stated that the provision of a channel of communication between youth non-governmental organizations and the United Nations as a whole was noble and important. Switzerland was fully in support of the resolution stating the importance of future sessions of the Forum. Belarus stated that the Forum was one of the obvious steps in the development of cooperation in the field of youth. Burkina Faso replied that the Forum was a good opportunity for young people to express themselves and make a contribution. Hungary noted that the establishment of the Forum represented a serious commitment to strengthen the idea of youth participation and could be a good example for other international organizations. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea noted that the Forum served as a significant vehicle for promoting world peace and security.

69. Finland found it necessary to ensure an active dialogue between the United Nations and youth organizations in the future. This would make it possible for youth to have more influence on the policies and work of the United Nations system. The Forum's unclear status and its irregular timing raised some concerns. The Danish Youth Council, responding on behalf of Denmark, stated that it could not recommend a continuation of the Forum in its present form.

Structure

70. Burkina Faso replied that future sessions should be more concrete and realistic, and that they needed to have greater involvement of Member States through ministries of youth; it would be better to have more time for debate among young people, especially on resolutions and recommendations. Hungary stated that the role of the Forum in the United Nations decision-making process should be strengthened. Sessions should be organized on a regular basis, rotating among continents, with the host countries to be chosen through an application process. National and regional forums should be held between Forum sessions to ensure regular youth participation in the United Nations decision-making process at all levels.

71. The Netherlands stated that delegates to the sessions of the Forum had been insufficiently informed about the results and consequences of previous sessions, which prejudiced continuity and resulted in duplication. The Philippines said that the Forum should be able to show how opportunities can be made accessible to youth. Switzerland noted that sessions of the Forum should be linked with a governmental conference on youth or youth-related issues.

Organization

72. Finland recommended that the preparatory process be further improved. In this regard, Hungary recommended that national youth organizations of the hosting country should be involved in the planning and the logistic processes of the Forum. Concerning the International Planning Committee, Burkina Faso stated that there was a general lack of understanding of its work and a lack of communication among stakeholders. The Netherlands observed that Committee members differed in their interpretation of its assigned tasks. Switzerland offered that Committee member organizations must be legitimate, representative and effective, have democratic internal procedures, demonstrate geographical and political balance and guarantee inclusion of the interests of marginalized youth.

73. Financial issues were also touched upon. The Philippines held the view that the Forum should consider budgetary problems, especially those relating to representatives coming from developing Member States. Denmark observed that several countries could not afford to participate and that the problem of financing must be solved.

Participation

74. Burkina Faso stated that there was a lack of understanding about the selection system. Denmark stressed the question of representation: the fact that youth structures varied around the world meant that delegations differed from one another considerably; delegates from a number of countries did not represent independent youth organizations. Finland noted that there should be more balanced regional representation, with attention paid to the age of the participants and to gender balance. Hungary proposed that participants should not be seen as representing the world's youth, which would be impossible without election by all young people of the world, but instead as representing the interests of the young people of the world.

75. The Netherlands considered that a better way of ensuring diversity of opinion was to select participants via youth organizations affiliated with regional umbrella organizations. Greater use of the Internet would allow many more people to participate. The Philippines suggested selecting participants at the subregional level to ensure equitable representation. Switzerland viewed the success of the conference as highly dependent on the participants and their legitimacy.

Processes

76. The Philippines stated that the process seemed comprehensive and the outputs very commendable. Burkina Faso found that while the Forum involved good debates, and the declaration was an important step forward, some improvements could be made, such as moving specific introductory communications from the plenary to working groups. Finland called for strengthening the dialogue between the secretariat and the regional youth structures. Hungary recommended that the Forum schedule be organized so that preparation of the outcome document was given priority.

77. The Netherlands expressed the view that presentations by United Nations agencies should be shortened at the Forum to allow more time for working groups to draft texts. Switzerland noted that it would be preferable for participants to prepare a draft document beforehand and use the working group to find common language,

and that pre-defined rules of procedure for the plenary would contribute to the political importance of the outcomes.

D. Conclusions and recommendations

78. On balance, feedback received from participants in the Forum tended to be negative, while the responses received from Member States were mixed. Still, the majority of respondents argued for continuation of the World Youth Forum in some form. It should be noted that fewer young people are organized today than in years past, and their involvement in youth organizations is, by definition, short-lived. From this perspective, promoting youth participation in multilateral decision-making processes is especially difficult, even as it remains an important goal. In this respect, the Forum has been an ongoing experiment in such participation for both the United Nations and the youth organizations represented in it.

79. Other, perhaps more efficient and effective, forms of participation of young people in decision-making processes at the United Nations have evolved over the past several years. The formation of a youth caucus and the recognition of youth as a major stakeholder group in the preparatory process of the World Summit on Sustainable Development is a recent example of how the voices of young people can be heard and make an impact on policy-making discussions by Governments. The inclusion of young people in the official delegations of Member States to the General Assembly is another example. While the number of young people involved remains limited, their participation has proved to be effective when they have been allowed to take part in debates, including negotiations on resolutions that affect young people. There were also positive results when young people were asked to take part, on an equal basis, in recent consultative processes within the Secretariat.[6] There are also successful examples of inclusion of young people and children in the governing bodies of the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and in the special session of the General Assembly on Children. Through these and other developments, important lessons are being learned in the ongoing experiment of youth participation at the United Nations.

80. **Any future sessions of the World Youth Forum should avoid large-scale, unfocused discussions that are not directly linked to any intergovernmental process. Without such a direct link, future sessions of the Forum risk increasing frustration among young people and disappointment with the workings of Governments and the United Nations system. Therefore, it is recommended that the convening of future sessions of the Forum be based on an intergovernmental mandate emanating from the General Assembly.**

81. **In order to promote meaningful youth participation, Governments should take a more positive stance when addressing the ideas and questions of young people. In view of the large number of challenges facing young people, the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action, in 2005, represents both an opportunity and a call for action in addressing those challenges. It provides a real opportunity for a focused intervention by young people and Governments to respond to the issues of concern to young people.**

Notes

[1] General Assembly resolution 50/81, annex; see www.un.org/youth for related documents.

[2] See *World Population Prospects: The 2000 Revision* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.01.XIII.8).

[3] See General Assembly resolution 50/81, annex, para. 125.

[4] See A/53/378, resolution 54/120, A/C.3/56/2 and resolution 56/117.

[5] Only at its third session, in June 2000, did the Committee agree on its full membership. The list of member organizations is available at www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/library/ipcmembers.pdf.

[6] Such as the Expert Group Meeting on Global Priorities for Youth (summary) and the activities of the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network.